

Overview of the philosophy and practices of the Hare Krishna Movement

History

- satanana (eternal) dharma (religion) Can true religion have a beginning?
- parampara or sampradaya (disciplic succession)
- spiritual master (one can only please and know God through hearing from and serving devotees)
- Srila Prabhupada is the founder of ISKCON. ISKCON is a branch of the sampradaya that follows Krishna—Brahma—Madhvacarya—Caitanya—Bhaktisiddhanta
- Scriptures
 - Four main Vedas deal primarily with hymns and rituals for pious life. They also cover all areas of ordinary life such as medicine, warfare, architecture, and so forth
 - Upanisads deal with the existence of God and transcendence
 - Vedanta Sutra summarizes all philosophy in code form
 - Itihasas and Puranas are histories with much religious instruction
 - Mahabharata and Ramayana are lengthy epics that tell history and philosophy
- ISKCON's main scriptures are Bhagavad-gita, which is from a section of the Mahabharata, and Srimad Bhagavatam, which is one of the Puranas. The Bhagavad-gita specifically deals with full loving devotion and surrender to God and was spoken directly by Him. It was put into written form about 5,000 years ago. The Srimad-Bhagavatam is a compilation of discussions within discussions, all of which concern the activities of God and his servants, prayers, the nature of this world, and how to develop pure love of God. Members of ISKCON also study many books and commentaries written by devotional scholars. We accept the rest of the Vedic scriptures as authoritative though some deal with lesser aspects of life. We also accept the Bible and Koran as bona-fide scriptures.

Philosophy

- **Soul**—conditioned and liberated. The soul is the real person. The body is a temporary covering of the self, which is the soul. The soul has personality, desires, activities, and a spiritual form. The soul is eternal, having not only no end but also no beginning. We are “created” in the sense that we “come from” God like sunlight comes from the sun. Yet the sun and sunlight exist simultaneously. Liberated souls exist in God's kingdom (and sometimes in this world as preachers who may or may not have a material body) in their original spiritual form where they serve the Lord with great happiness and knowledge. Conditioned souls struggle in the material world, serving God indirectly, as prisoners serve the government indirectly.
- Nature of fall and of evil—A soul who rebels against God's supremacy cannot remain in the Kingdom of God. Such a soul gets a body and mind with which to fulfill desires separate from God, and is put into this world of temporary illusion where he or she can imagine him or herself to be supreme. Evil is simply the absence of love of God or the perversion of it. When love is perverted, it becomes exploitive and envious. Evil, or sin, can also be defined as acting against our true nature as God's servants. Evil is due to ignorance, but that ignorance is willful, at least in the original sense.

- Transmigration (karma and reincarnation)—All suffering in this world is due to the actions of those who are suffering. God is not cruel or whimsical. Our suffering's ultimate purpose is to reform us and help us return to the path of loving surrender to the Lord. The philosophy of karma and transmigration perfectly harmonizes the reality of this world with an all-powerful and all-good God. All karma is removed for one who fully accepts becoming a disciples of the Lord or his representative.
- Cosmic geography and hierarchy—the material world is full of inhabited planets. There are different levels of material “heavens” where pious and religious souls live as angels or demigods. There are also levels of planets where souls have evil natures and demonic tendencies. Above all these is God's personal kingdom which also has levels or types of abodes. All the beings there are pure in love of God and have an unlimited variety of activities with Him in loving service.
- Process of reviving original nature (general principles)
 - Nine processes (these are actions on the spiritual platform, not material work) They are:
 - 1)Hearing about the name, form, glories, and activities of the Lord and his servants, 2)Reciting those glories, 3)Remembering those glories, 4)Bowling down to the Lord and offering prayers to Him and his servants, 5)Serving people who are dear to the Lord, 6)Acting as a servant of the Lord, 7)Worshipping the Lord (formal worship rituals), 8)Becoming the Lord's friend, and 9)Surrendering everything to the Lord.
 - Love, devotion, service—are the essence of the spiritual path
 - Spiritual instead of material desires—one cannot stop desires or actions but rather transform them back into their original state of wanting to serve the Lord. For example: all activities are offered as a “sacrifice” to the Lord. Before eating, one doesn't just thank God, but offers the food to him first before eating, thus recognizing him as the supreme master and friend.
 - Love all living entities—One who serves or worships God but doesn't see everyone as His temple is a “devotee” on the most neophyte platform. The more one is advanced spiritually, the more one has respect and love for everyone—not just human but all life and all things—as everyone is part of God and dear to him. That love is shown practically by using everything in his service and by helping others to serve him. It is also shown practically by living a life as free from violence as possible. (See additional under “How to Live”—external)
- **God**
 - 6 opulences—God has unlimited beauty, fame, wealth, strength, intelligence/knowledge, and renunciation.
 - Impersonal/personal—As God is complete, he cannot be less than his creation. He therefore exists as the Supreme Person, though not in a limited was as we experience in this world. He also has his impersonal aspects. Technical term is acintya bedhabeda tattva (inconceivably one with yet separate from everything) One can analyze God as:
 - Bhagavan—the Supreme Person with six opulences, full of eternity (existence), knowledge, and bliss. He exhibits a spiritual form and has a

variety of spiritual activities with his loving servants in his own kingdom. This is God as fully transcendent.

- Paramatma—The judge in this world, the witness, the creator of the world, the friend, the Lord indwelling in the heart. (Holy Ghost) He is full of eternity (existence) and knowledge, but is not displaying his full extent of divine pleasure. Those who act as spiritual master (or when the Lord himself comes as spiritual master) are manifestations of this aspect of God
- Brahman—the all pervading immortal, imperishable, and eternal aspect of God. He is existence itself, but is not displaying his full extent of knowledge or pleasure. This is God as fully immanent.
- Incarnations—God can and does appear in this world many times—who can stop him or limit him to say that he cannot? Sometimes he sends his son or representative. He can appear in his own transcendent, spiritual form or appear within matter which is also his energy and from his point of view, also divine. The deity form (icon) is an example of his incarnation within matter.
- Rasas—spiritual world geography. In the Lord’s kingdom beyond all the levels in this world, God has five main types of relationships with his pure servants. These relationships exist in a perverted form within our experience. The relationships are: 1)awe and reverence in a neutral state, 2)active service, 3)friendship, 4)parental (the Lord appears as one’s son, student, or other subordinate), and 5)conjugal (the Lord appears as one’s husband or beloved) Within different areas of the Lord’s kingdom, these different relationships are more or less dominant.
- Nature, qualities—the Lord is all good and all merciful. His is supreme justice, but his mercy exceeds his justice or there would be no redemption for sinful souls. His qualities, while unlimited, have been analyzed and described in detail. Within this world we perceive him as the creator, judge, and witness, but he has many qualities beyond that. He is full in himself, self-satisfied, and able to fulfill his own desires. Yet he “desires” the love of the souls he has created.
- **Matter**
 - One of three energies—God is in one sense, everything, yet everything is also not him. He has three energies—spiritual, marginal (the souls), and material. The material energy is illusion not in the sense of non-existence, but in the sense that all its forms and names are temporary. It is also illusory in the sense that we fallen souls perceive matter as not being related to God.
 - Three modes—everything material is a combination of goodness, passion, and ignorance. These modes govern activities, knowledge, relationships, food, and even systems of “religion.” They also influence religious people who are not yet completely surrendered to God’s will.
 - Use in Kṛṣṇa’s service (immanence/transcendence or both?)—because everything is God’s energy and in one sense, God himself, everything can be connected to him through service. A thing isn’t in itself evil—it is the use of it and the consciousness that makes it so. Some examples: 1) sex is spiritually elevating when used by married couples to produce a child they will raise to glorify God. It is degrading when used only for bodily pleasure, for exploitation, in a perverted method, etc. 2) the products of alcohol are all good and useful food items which, when eaten in a fresh state, can produce good health and vitality. Rotten food can

be used as compost. 3) Violence is good when used in war against evil or when capturing criminals, etc.

How to Live Two svadharmas—we have our eternal “duties” or activities as soul but while in this body we also have responsibilities and work related to this world. While our “work” in this world cannot by itself give us liberation or love of God, there is a way to make that work favorable and even spiritualized.

- **Spiritual**

- Nine Processes—as described under philosophy
- Sadhana—this means “practice” and is a means by which the nine processes become “ritualized” so that someone who wants to love God can re-awaken that condition. The rituals come from the scriptures and from the way that previous teachers/priests/saints have practiced the nine processes in their lives. Inherent in these practices is a placing of one’s heart on the spiritual rather than the material. Gradually, the practitioner is expected to develop a natural attraction for these practices. The most basic form of these practices is as follows: (those in monastic life have a more rigorous program throughout the day)
 - Rise before sunrise, preferably by 4:00 am
 - Bathe and dress in clean clothes
 - Gather with others, if possible, and spend ½ hour in responsive singing of the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra and other glorification of the Lord. Generally, devotees gather in a special room in their home where there are pictures or Deity forms of Kṛṣṇa, Lord Caitanya, and Srīla Prabhupada. (Some devotees travel daily to a temple outside their home.)
 - Chant the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra (Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa, Hare Hare, Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare) quietly to oneself. Devotees of Kṛṣṇa usually count the number of mantras they chant on a string of 108 beads. Initiates chant at least sixteen times around the beads daily.
 - Read the scriptures and discuss the meaning and application according the teachings of great devotees. Our main scripture for morning study is the Srimad Bhagavatam.
 - All food is first offered to the Lord before eating
- Śraddha to Prema—as someone practices sadhana, he or she is expected to progress in devotion. Sometimes this progression is defined as degrees of faith; in other words, one who has full and total faith is also completely in pure love of God, while one whose faith is weak is a beginner.

The Nine Stages

1. *Ḥraddha* — First comes “faith,” some respect for and attraction to Kāñḥea consciousness.
66997340. *Sādhū-saiga* — Due to *ḥraddha*, one is open to associate with devotees. Hearing from them about Kāñḥea consciousness, his *ḥraddha* increases.
66997428. *Bhājana-kriyā* — One takes shelter of a particular *sādhū* and, under his guidance, begins to engage in *sādhana-bhakti*.
66997516. *Anartha-nivāṭṭi* — Due to engaging in devotional service, the undesirable material impediments in one’s heart begin to dissolve.
66997604. *Niñḥā* — When the material impediments are practically gone, one becomes steadily fixed in constant and attentive *sādhana*.
66997692. *Ruci* — When one’s *sādhana* becomes constant and attentive, one develops a strong and genuine relish (“taste”) for those blissful activities.

66997780. *Āsakti* — Gradually this taste for *sādhana* matures into an emotional addiction, and one fervently desires to please Kāñṛṇā by achieving perfect love of Godhead.

66997868. *Bhāva* — One's *sādhana*, executed with fervently sincere desire to please Kāñṛṇā, finally makes the heart fit for receiving the Lord's full mercy, which descends into the heart and begins to arouse the dormant seed of *prema*.

66997956. *Prema* — Pure love of Godhead fully awakens and one achieves direct loving service in one's eternal self-realized position.

NOD pg. 146: "The beginning of ecstatic love of Godhead is basically faith [*çraddha*]. There are many societies and associations of pure devotees, and if someone with just a little faith begins to associate with such societies, his advancement to pure devotional service is rapid. The influence of a pure devotee is such that if someone comes to associate with him with a little faith, one gets the chance of hearing about the Lord from authoritative scriptures like *Bhagavad-Gētā* and *Çrémad-Bhāgavatam*. Thus, by the mercy of the Lord, who is situated in everyone's heart, one gradually develops his faith in the descriptions of such authoritative scriptures. This is the first stage of association with pure devotees. In the second stage, after one becomes a little advanced and mature, he automatically offers to follow the principles of devotional service under the guidance of the pure devotee and accepts him as the spiritual master. In the next stage, under the guidance of the spiritual master, the devotee executes regulative devotional service [*bhajana-kriyā*] and as a result of such activities, he becomes freed from all unwanted occupations [*anārtha-nivāṭṭi*]. When he is freed from unwanted occupations, his faith becomes steadily fixed [*niñhā*], and he develops a transcendental taste for devotional service [*ruc*], then attachment [*āśakti*], the ecstasies [*bhāva*], and in the last stage there is pure love of Godhead [*prema*]."

- **External**
- General—everyone should do some work to maintain his body that is honest and suitable for his or her mental and bodily nature. The work and its results should be done to glorify the Lord. At least the results should be offered to Krishna.
- Cleanliness/regulation/freedom from sin—These basic principles are for everyone. They cannot give pure love of God, nor is love of God dependent on them, but they are most helpful and it is rare for love of God to develop in their absence.
- Absolute and relative morality and ethics—the real definition of morality and ethics is that which is pleasing to God. Under almost all circumstances almost all of the time, this means following the codes of scripture, although there will be differences of specific application in various times, places, and circumstances. Under highly unusual circumstances, the Lord himself may ask his devotee to break ordinary moral codes for a higher purpose (Arjuna who fought against his grandfather and teacher in the battle of Kurushetra; Abraham who was asked to sacrifice his son, etc.) Also, there are different subtleties of morals according to the body and the job. For example, the duties of women are somewhat different from those of men, a policeman has to use violence whereas a teacher should not, and so forth.
- Loving neighbor—material and spiritual—pious charity work, while good, is not equal to spiritually benefiting others. Also, our "neighbor" must be defined as all living beings, not just our kinsman, or our countrymen, or those of the same religious faith, or even just other human beings. The animals are also our "neighbors."
 - Truthfulness, austerity, cleanliness, mercy—these are qualities which every human being should strive for.

- The basic requirements to be free from grossly sinful behavior and to attain these good qualities are to abstain from:
 - 1) eating meat, fish, and eggs. The unnecessary killing of sentient beings destroys our qualities of mercy and is also very unclean.
 - 2) having illicit sex. Sex is sacred when used in marriage with the intention of having children that the couple will raise in religious life. The celibate life is encouraged for those who are inspired to serve God in that way. Birth control, abortion, homosexuality, pornography, and so on, are grossly sinful and cannot be indulged in if one wants to gain the grace and favor of God. Illicit sex destroys cleanliness (and breeds disease born of uncleanness) and any tendency toward austerity. Those who break vows in order to have illicit sex also violate truthfulness.
 - 3) intoxication. One has to have a clear and sober mind to know God. Intoxication puts one under the material mode of ignorance, where true spiritual knowledge cannot awaken. It poisons the body which is God's temple. Intoxication reduces mercy, any tendency toward austerity, and increases uncleanness.
 - 4) gambling. One should earn one's livelihood by honest means and depend on Krishna's grace for whatever material prosperity one does or does not achieve. Gambling cannot exist alongside faith that God is maintaining one, and it promotes a mentality of cheating others. It destroys truthfulness and austerity.
- According to individual psychology and physical propensities—we should each work in this world according to our talents, inclinations, abilities, etc. We should do some work so that our mind will be peaceful and in a proper state to do the nine processes of devotion according to our sadhana process.
- Varnasrama, now incorrectly known as a caste system by birth, is a scientific way of dividing work in society according to a person's innate qualities and qualifications. It is a system of government and economics that is most favorable for the development of spiritual life among the general population. Classes are recognized, and there is competition within classes, but cooperation between classes. There are also two divisions—one of varna, or one's means of livelihood, and one of ashrama, or one's status with regard to the religious duties one does.
- Modern society—we live in a society that is geared to providing a fertile field for materialism. Making the best use of a bad bargain, we live as simply and as close to the varasrama principles as we can, while practicing sadhana bhakti.